

The Boy and the Puffins



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On a bright windy morning, a small ferry bobbed across the sea toward a green island. A boy in a bright yellow raincoat stood at the rail, his red rubber boots squeaking on the wet deck. He held a small notebook and pencil, ready to draw everything he saw. His name was Sam, and he was eight years old, with messy black hair and a wide, gap-toothed smile.



The island rose from the water like a giant green turtle, its cliffs dotted with white birds. Sam's dark-brown eyes grew wide. "Look at all the seabirds!" he shouted. A tall ranger in an olive-green uniform and a khaki hat met him at the dock. "Welcome to Puffin Island," she said with a kind smile. "I'm Ranger Jo. Let's find the puffins!"



Ranger Jo led Sam along a winding path covered in soft grass. "Puffins are funny little seabirds," she explained. "They have black and white feathers and bright orange beaks striped with yellow and blue." Sam scribbled in his notebook. Soon he heard a soft, purring sound. "That's them!" whispered Ranger Jo. "They're just around the bend."



Sam peeked over a grassy bank and gasped. Dozens of puffins waddled about, plump and round, their orange feet pattering on the ground. One carried a silver fish in its beak. Another tilted its head and blinked at Sam with small dark eyes. "They look like little clowns!" Sam giggled. He drew a puffin with a comical waddle and a striped beak.



Ranger Jo pointed to holes in the grassy slope. "Those are puffin burrows," she said. "That's where they lay their eggs and raise their chicks." Sam watched a puffin disappear into a burrow with a flick of its black and white tail. "The paths keep us from stepping on their homes," Ranger Jo added. "But some visitors forget."



Just then, a family in colorful jackets came down the path. The children ran ahead, shouting and waving. A puffin flapped its wings and scurried away. "Stay on the path!" Ranger Jo called, but the family didn't hear. Sam saw a puffin tremble near its burrow. His smile faded. "They're scaring the puffins," he whispered.



More visitors arrived. Some wandered off the path to take photos. A plastic bag blew across the grass, and a puffin tried to peck it. "Oh no," said Sam. "That could hurt them." He watched a puffin hide in its burrow and not come out. "The puffins are shy," said Ranger Jo. "Loud noises and people too close make them afraid."



Sam opened his notebook and began to draw. He drew a puffin with a big orange beak and wrote: "Please stay on the paths." He drew a family watching quietly and wrote: "Keep voices soft." He drew a burrow with a chick inside and wrote: "Protect their homes." His pencil flew across the page. "This could help," he said.



Ranger Jo looked over Sam's shoulder. "That's a wonderful idea!" she said. "A guide for visitors, made by a kid, will make people listen." Sam smiled, showing the gap in his teeth. He added a drawing of a puffin carrying a fish and a cheerful sun. "I'll call it 'Puffin Island Rules,'" he said. "And I'll make it friendly, not bossy."



Sam worked all afternoon. He drew puffins waddling, puffins swimming, and puffins peeking from burrows. He wrote in big letters: "Stay on the paths," "Watch quietly," and "Take your litter home." He added a smiling puffin at the bottom. "There!" he said. "Now everyone can enjoy the island and keep the puffins safe."



The next morning, Ranger Jo helped Sam put up his guide at the visitor hut. It was bright and cheerful, with a big title: "How to Be a Puffin Friend." Visitors stopped to read it. "What a good idea!" said a woman with a camera. "I didn't know puffins lived in burrows." The children promised to stay on the path.



All day, Sam watched people read his guide. Families stayed on the paths and spoke in soft voices. The puffins came out of their burrows and waddled about, carrying fish and flapping their wings. "Look, they're not scared anymore!" Sam said. Ranger Jo nodded. "Because you helped people understand," she said. "That's what a good guide does."



A little girl pointed at a puffin and whispered, "He's so funny!" Sam grinned. He saw the plastic bag was gone, picked up by a visitor who read his sign. The puffins bobbed and preened, their orange beaks shining in the sun. "You made a difference, Sam," said Ranger Jo. "Even small ideas can protect nature."



At the end of the day, Ranger Jo gave Sam a small badge shaped like a puffin. "For being a Puffin Friend," she said. Sam's dark-brown eyes sparkled. "I'll come back next year," he said. "And I'll bring more guides!" He waved goodbye to the puffins, who waddled on the grass, busy and safe.



On the ferry home, Sam drew one last picture in his notebook: a puffin with a striped beak, standing on a path, with a smiling boy in a yellow raincoat. Under it he wrote, "Wildlife tourism should be responsible." He closed the notebook and watched the island shrink. The puffins were safe, and he had helped.



That night, Sam told his family about the puffins and his guide. "Even a kid can help protect nature," he said. "All you need is a good idea and a little kindness." His gap-toothed smile stretched wide. And on Puffin Island, the puffins waddled safely along their paths, watched by quiet, happy visitors.